



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED

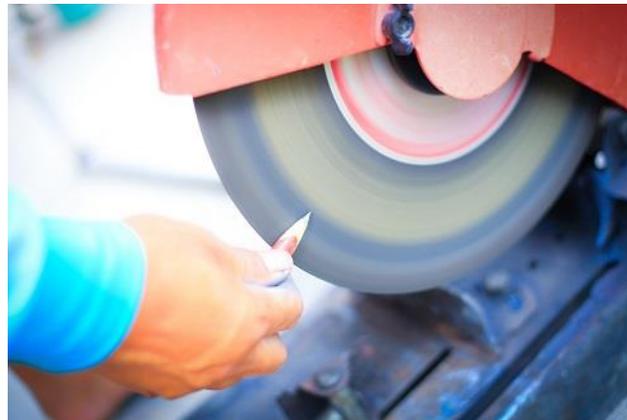


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### WRONG TOOL FOR THE JOB

**“Now, this is not a drill..” — Anonymous deck officer...or shop teacher.**

Take a casual stroll down the tool aisle at your favorite hardware or auto parts store and you'll see hundreds of tools that are just right for the job. From augers to zip-tie cutters, there's a specific tool for whatever project that's sending you to the hardware store for the third time. Using the right tool makes the task simpler and safer, but for some, the rush to get the job done “right now” vs. “right” ends in preventable injuries and lost time from work. From FY 2017 until August 2020, we found plenty of injuries from tools, including more than 130 mishaps, where using the wrong tool turned a simple task into a trip to the emergency room. Before you reach for that crescent wrench to use as a hammer, read on and learn from the unintended (*but predictable*) outcomes of our wrong-tool warriors.



◆ A fleet-wide exercise was going to commence in less than 30 minutes, and the pressure was on to repair an important phone line. A telephone repair technician was on scene, and a civilian employee was assisting in expediting the work. The assistant did not have the proper tools to perform the repair and improvised with the five-inch blade knife he carried (*ORM warning bells should be ringing*). He put the knife tip into a locking pin on the back of the land-line telephone and tried to open the back of the phone. While attempting to open it, the knife's tip slipped out of the locking pin and stabbed into his right arm. It cut the artery. Blood sprayed out of the wound, and another employee grabbed a personal towel to help stop the bleeding. They called for emergency assistance and an ambulance was dispatched. The report offers no further details except, “his artery was damaged to the point it could not be reattached and was tied off.” — *We don't know what that means exactly, but it doesn't sound good. Crikey! Rushing is dangerous, and knives are not prying tools. A knife is NEVER the right tool, unless you are cutting something (and not zip ties).*

◆ A Sailor aboard ship needed to cut a wire on an engine that was too high to reach. What tools would you say he'd need? Perhaps a ladder and a wire cutter? Well, he chose differently, electing instead to stand on a chair to cut the wire with a multi-tool knife. As you can imagine (*especially since we are talking about it*), he slipped from the chair and cut “his third, fourth, and fifth digit fingers” (*it doesn't say whether that was the knife-holding hand or the free hand*). The ship's medical determined that he needed stitches and sent him to the local Naval Medical Center to be put back together. He earned 20 days of limited duty to heal up afterward. — *This was a two-for-one lesson. Chairs are never the right tool to fill in for a ladder (especially if they have wheels), and knives are not wire cutters. This Sailor will always have hand scars to remind him to choose the right tools. Let's learn from his scars too.*

◆ A government civilian was repairing a washer when he accidentally cut his right index finger. Why? He was using a knife instead of a screwdriver. The report states that he knew he was using the wrong tool but thought to himself, “this will just take a second” and used it anyway. It did only take a second...for him to require stitches. The report goes on to say that “he was returned to work, and is now a volunteer for the next training session involving proper tool usage.” — *He learned his lesson the hard way. Now let's learn from him too. A knife is not a screwdriver (or wire cutter or pry tool).*

## WRONG TOOL FOR THE JOB

◆ The report opens with “this is ground, injury, non-alcohol related incident.” Well, at least we know the mishap victim was sober. While off duty, a Sailor was attempting to cut off a zip tie with a butcher knife (*all we can say here is “Nooooooooo!!!”*). Big surprise: It slipped, causing a deep laceration in her left hand. She wrapped her hand and drove herself to the emergency room (ER). How nasty was the laceration? Well, the report states that upon arrival at the ER, the Sailor “was immediately taken to a separate room,” and that she was “in a panic and hyperventilating because of the bleeding.” She received 20 stitches (*that’s more than some shark-bite victims*), prescribed medication (*we figure antibiotics and pain meds*), and seven days sick in quarters to recover. — *Please learn from reading this! Knives are not zip-tie cutters either. We see SO MANY injuries of Sailors and Marines who use knives to cut zip ties. Using a butcher knife took it to a whole new level, though. “Zip-tie cutters” are an actual tool. They are really cheap to buy, both for home and for work. The small cost is way cheaper than the pain (and possible medical co-pays) from using the wrong tool.*

◆ While line handling on the pier, a civilian employee asked crewmembers on the ship to hand down a long boat hook to gather the eye of the line to put it on the bit. That was a fine plan, except what they mistakenly handed down to him was a fishing gaff (*a long-handled pole with a sharp hook on the end that is used to stab a large fish and then lift the fish out of the water*) that had been stowed improperly and left on the deck. The unsuspecting employee had the eye of the line in one hand and grasped the “boat hook” in the other hand. When he tried to slide the boat hook/gaff away from the ship to the bit to use both hands on the mooring line, the end of the gaff rotated and punctured his right forearm. — *Sometimes it isn’t the mishap victim who chooses the wrong tool. Supervisors, teach your team what the right tool looks like for a given task.*

◆ A Marine Corps unit was setting up camouflage netting at their training site. Two Marines were securing the netting to a three-foot engineer stake. Marine #1 was pulling on the netting to provide slack on the line, while Marine #2 was pounding the stake into the ground. The report doesn’t conclusively determine “how” things went wrong, but it clearly says “what” went wrong. Whether it was due to horseplay (*“Hey, Joe! What if I use this?”*) or a genuine attempt to use a .50 caliber round of unexploded ordnance (UXO) as an improvised hammer, the round exploded in his left hand, causing fragmentation damage and burns. He was treated on scene by a corpsman and medevaced to a nearby hospital. Of note, a sledgehammer was nearby. — *Add “UXO” to the list of things that aren’t hammers. This list also includes Kevlar helmets. It may be tempting to use yours because it’s right there with you, but it’s a tool intended to protect your brain housing group from 7.62 rounds. Don’t weaken it by pounding tent stakes with it.*

### Lessons Learned / Key Takeaways

**1. A knife is not a [fill in the blank].** A knife is not a screwdriver, wire cutter, zip-tie cutter, prying tool, scrub brush (*it’s a real mishap*), wire stripper...etc. (Additional note, a box cutter is NOT a bagel slicer (*also a real mishap*)). The few seconds it takes to go to the toolbox or the shop for the right tool will save you time (*and stitches*) in the long run.

**2. A chair is not a ladder.** We admit that we’ve done it too. But please don’t - especially if the chair has wheels. Go get the step stool or ladder. The trip to the storage room is way shorter than the trip to the ER.

**3. Know the right tools for the job (and what they look like).** Supervisors, train your team.

**4. Don’t rush. “Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast.”** When we’re in a hurry, it’s tempting to take shortcuts by improvising with whatever “tool” we have on hand. Don’t. It just takes longer when we hurt ourselves or break something.

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